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The Transfer Path in College Admissions: Part I

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driving individuals back to college for more training, and an increasing number of applicants displaced from the UC and CSU campuses due to a more competitive admissions environment. Regarding the latter, California's high school students faced the most competitive admissions cycle to date. California public universities targeted a reduction in overall freshmen enrollment (a 1500-student enrollment reduction was targeted by the UC for incoming freshmen this fall). In addition seven UCs added wait lists as did many of the 23 CSU campuses) and some universities (in particular UC Berkeley) boosted the admission of out-of-state and international students in order to generate revenue. Non-residents and international students pay higher tuition than state residents.

Even with declining enrollment, the community colleges are educating significantly more students than the state is funding. The CCC system sustained \$520 million in cuts, or 7.9% of its overall budget in 2009/2010. In March some districts distributed pink slips to entire administrative units. Many community colleges are dipping into their reserves and some colleges may not survive. The Chancellor likens this fiscal practice to "...a family living off its saving account." After some period of time, you go bankrupt.

Some community college districts are reporting that approximately 50% of new students trying to enroll are being turned away. Frequently this is due to a decrease in class access; statewide course selections were reduced by over 5% for the 2009/2010 academic year and the prediction is that this will worsen for 2010/2011. Unfortunately the situation is serious and it is not saber rattling by the chancellor's office. If funding levels remain the same or are cut further, more services and classes will be cut.

As the well educated baby boomers slowly move out of the workplace, they must be replaced by highly skilled and well trained individuals especially in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM). Tapan Monroe states in his column in the Wall

Community college student Danielle Guzman dreams of transferring to Cal State San Diego. Her goal: to earn a bachelor's degree in social work and work as an adoption caseworker. The 24-year-old is worried about finances and getting the right amount of counseling so she can figure out how to meet both the general education requirements and prerequisites for her intended major. Danielle explains, "The process of filling all the requirements, holding on to a part-time job to help pay the bills, and getting the right advice at the right time is very stressful."

Unfortunately, Danielle's predicament is not unique. Tens of thousands of students have suffered a severe impact from the state's budget crisis. It is helpful to understand some history about the State of California's Plan for Higher Education. In 1960 the state legislature ratified the Master Plan for Higher Education; the community college system and its accompanying transfer option to a four-year state university was born. As designed in 1960 the system rested heavily on a healthy transfer function between the California Community Colleges (110 state-wide accredited two-year colleges) and California's public four-year institutions. The basic design has not changed over the intervening five decades, but the demographics of the state and fiscal realities have changed dramatically. Students who plan to attend a community college and transfer to either a UC campus or a CSU must bravely confront a new world.

Enrollment data from our community college districts were submitted to the California Community Colleges (CCC) Chancellor's office early this spring. These figures show a statewide drop in enrollment for 2009/2010 of 1%, representing nearly 21,000 students. The picture is likely to worsen for the next academic year. The current situation parallels historical trends that show community college enrollment declines are triggered by loss of student access, which in turn stems directly from decreased funding. "Our enrollment is not dropping due to lack of demand," states CCC Chancellor Jack Scott "...our colleges are more popular than ever."

The CCC represents the single largest system of higher education in the nation. After peaking at nearly 3 million enrolled students in 2008/2009, there is a statewide decline in enrollment despite unprecedented demand. The increased demand arises from record numbers of graduating high school seniors, high unemployment

Street Journal (March 21, 2010), "It will be difficult to maintain ...productivity in light of the STEM gap and the general decline in investment in education at all levels from K-12, to college and graduate education....Historically America's economic success has been linked to high achievement at all levels of higher education."

As a state we must find ways to provide students with the crucial training and education needed to fill California's future social and economic demands; this helps to secure a higher wage workforce, protect our tax revenue base and provide public services to an increasingly diverse population-steps that are crucial to prevent the erosion of our state's middle class.

I am frequently asked how to best prepare a high school student to attend a community college with the plan in mind to transfer to a 4-year institution. My next column (June 9, 2010) will offer some advice to families and their students, including students who want to transfer to the UC, the CSU or to a private university.

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